



## **Social Media Campaign Messaging Plan**

Prepared for:

National Association of State Boating Law Administrators

[www.springaboard.org](http://www.springaboard.org)

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# Welcome

Dear Boating Safety Partner,

Join us as we encourage boaters to Spring Aboard by taking a safe boating course. Spring Aboard is a national public information and education campaign to reduce boating injuries and fatalities by encouraging the boating public to take a boating safety course. The campaign combines the efforts of boating education course providers, recreational boating safety organizations, and state and local entities involved in recreational boating regulation.

Developed by NASBLA, and produced under a grant administered by the U.S. Coast Guard, the annual Spring Aboard campaign informs and motivates boaters to prepare for the boating season by providing information on how to enroll in a boating knowledge or skills based education course. The campaign emphasizes enrollment in courses verified as meeting national boating knowledge or skill standards.

The campaign is enlisting a wide variety of organizations to provide information and resources that will extend the reach of the Spring Aboard campaign now and in the future.

This Social Media Campaign Messaging Plan will provide you with general Best Practices on how to use the deliverables provided in the Plan including Placement and Oversight and How to Use and Share Content.

In addition, the Plan will address how On-Water Course Providers can be actively involved in the campaign upon receiving Third-Party Course Verification of Skills Training and how they can promote the importance of skill-based on-water training programs through social media.

Please take a moment to review the Social Media Campaign Messaging Plan and the Spring Aboard website [www.springaboard.org](http://www.springaboard.org). If you have questions or can't find what you need, contact us at 859-225-9487 or [info@nasbla.org](mailto:info@nasbla.org).

We wish you a happy – and safe – boating season!

Regards,

John Johnson, CAE  
CEO

National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA)



# Best Practices

## Social Media Placement and Oversight

Because of its low-cost “investment,” its opportunity to get messaging directly to the end user – in this case, the recreational boater – and because of the proven Return on Investment (ROI), state agencies, organizations, the media and other partners have determined that promoting the Spring Aboard: Take a Safe Boating Course campaign through an aggressive social marketing approach is an essential component of its outreach and marketing efforts.

There are general Best Practices, regardless of what industry one may be in, that can help leverage any message on social media. This is a brief guide on those best practices broken down to address each “major” social media platform.

### Facebook

Facebook remains America’s most popular social networking platform: approximately 79% of all adults in the United States use Facebook. Young adults between the ages of 25 – 36 remain the top users on Facebook, but older adults are joining the social network. Women are using Facebook at a higher rate than men.<sup>i</sup>

If your agency or organization already has a Facebook page, the first step as you plan your Spring Aboard Campaign should be to analyze your Facebook Analytics. If they don’t already have a Facebook page, keep the following tips in mind as you set up your page and begin posting.

Your analytics provide you with key insights as to whom is visiting your page, their location, the time they’re visiting and the posts that garner the most impressions and engagement from your followers. This is important information as you prepare your Spring Aboard campaign.

Once you have a general understanding of your Analytics, use that data to start planning your campaign.

1. **Know your audience:** are most of your visitors and those that engage with your page male or female? Younger or older? Do the majority live in the city, suburbs, or rural areas? Let’s say that you have an older male audience. Research suggests that this demographic will change their behavior if they can personally see themselves in the stories you tell.<sup>ii</sup> You may want to focus more on “Saved by the Jacket” survivor stories from other adult males, rather than “talking head” public service announcements.
2. **Post Timely and Frequently:** Analytics provided by Facebook suggest that the best time to post on Facebook is between 12:00 PM and 3:00 PM. While this timeframe is consistent throughout the week, Saturday and Sunday typically will have less engagement than Monday through Friday.



In general terms, your visitors will only engage with you if you post often. They're likely not thinking about your Facebook page or campaign unless it's in their News Feed. **It is recommended to post at least once a day, and – if your content is timely – then posting more than once a day will increase your reach.**

3. **Keep your posts short and take advantage of Photos and Video:** How you create each post is important: remember that most people on Facebook are scrolling through their newsfeed and aren't typically going out of their way to visit your page. You need to "hook" the reader with short, specific messaging, ideally with a Call to Action. Do you want the individual to Like or Share the post? Then ask them to in the message! Do you want them to visit a specific website? Give them a reason to want to learn more.

Photos and videos attract a visitor's attention more than just text. For every post, make sure to include a related photo. Video has the same effect, but remember the first tip – make sure your video is short. In addition, if you have the original video, upload it directly to Facebook, rather than share a YouTube link. This will result in a higher view and impression rate. Facebook is set up to automatically play a video, whereas a YouTube video uploaded on Facebook requires the person to click before the video will start.

**If you're looking for high-resolutions photos that demonstrate safe boating practices or the outdoors, here's a few options:**

**U.S. Coast Guard:** <http://www.uscgboating.org/multimedia/gallery.php>

**Take Me Fishing:** <http://news.takemefishing.org/imagegallery>

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:**

<https://digitalmedia.fws.gov/cdm/landingpage/collection/natdiglib>

4. **Tag others, but skip the hashtag:** When posting to Facebook, make sure to "tag" relevant organizations and partners by using the @ and then type in their name. For example, if the Spring Aboard campaign is posting about different organizations that offer boating safety courses, the post may look like this:

Want to take an online safe boating course? @BoatUSFoundation @USCGAux @United States Power Squadrons @BoatEd @BoaterExam [@StateAgency] are all great options! Learn more at [www.springaboard.org](http://www.springaboard.org).

Notice what isn't in that sample post: a hashtag. A hashtag is a "word or phrase preceded by a hash or pound sign (#) and used to identify messages on a specific topic." Its intention is to allow people to click on the hashtag to search the "word or phrase" to see similar posts.

While hashtags work on Facebook, they don't typically have the same impact as they do as on Twitter. Because you want to keep your posts short and specific, adding hashtags can muddle the message while adding little value.



## Twitter

Twitter is more likely used by younger Americans and, in total, 24% of Internet users use Twitter. Data suggests that Twitter is also more popular among those that are more educated. While Facebook gives you the opportunity to present a “story,” Twitter’s Golden Rule is to keep it short.

1. **Keep it short:** When Twitter was created, the user only had 140 characters to create their message. On November 7, 2017, based on its analytics and data, Twitter allowed all users to draft their message using 280 characters. Whether you want to keep your message as short as possible or use the full 280 characters, just remember to keep your message short and to the point. Resist saying more if it’s unnecessary.
2. **Use visuals:** The old saying “A picture is worth a thousand words” still holds true in the digital world and since you only have about 50 words you can use in a tweet, be sure to complement your tweet with a picture, gif, meme or video (tip: they don’t take away from your character count!)

Note: if you want to share a video on Twitter directly, be aware that Twitter only allows videos under 60 seconds. If you want to share a longer video, then share the YouTube link. Again, like Facebook, you’ll get more views and impressions with a video directly posted to Twitter, rather than a YouTube link, but the time limit may prevent you from doing so.

3. **Use hashtags:** Hashtags were created so a user could click one to see related posts or to see what’s trending. For example, #ThrowbackThursday is a typical hashtag you’ll see Twitter users use every week to share an old photo or event.

We’ve done the research for you: specifically for the Spring Aboard Campaign, the following hashtags are used often within the recreational boating safety community:

#SpringAboard

#Boating

#Fishing

#SafeBoating

#BoatingSafety

#LifeJacket

#WearIt

4. **Engage with your followers:** When you’re logged into Twitter, at the top of the page will be a tab that says **Notifications**: if you click on that, you’ll get information on who started following your account, who has liked or retweeted your tweets and comments on tweets.



Don't ignore these, instead use these as opportunities to engage with people that have expressed an interest in your program.

## How to Use and Share Content

### State Agencies

1. **Customize Your Campaign:** The campaign messaging presented by Spring Aboard is generic enough for multiple partners to integrate into their campaign efforts, but customizable options are available and NASBLA encourages state partners to customize all your messages specifically for your state's boaters.

Start with using the customized Spring Aboard logo with your state's name. This will create an identity for the messaging and will make the end user feel as though your messages are speaking directly to them.

When linking to safe boating courses, make sure that you're sending boaters to the state-specific course, rather than the generic course. Make it as easy as possible for them to sign up for a course.

For example, if Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission wants to create a post about taking BoatU.S. Foundation's online course, send them to [www.boatus.org/florida](http://www.boatus.org/florida) rather than the generic landing page, [www.boatus.org/free](http://www.boatus.org/free).

In the Communications Plan, Spring Aboard has provided you with a customizable press release and radio public service announcement scripts. It has provided sample quotes, but take some time to update those, for example, with a local boating survival story rather than the generic quote.

Customize your URLs: When compiling a message and you want to link to a URL, it's best to shorten the URL using free online shortener platforms like <https://goo.gl/> or <http://www.bitly.com>. Not only will these sites shorten the URL, they also offer customization options. For example, instead of linking to California's Boating Safe Classes and Courses page ([https://dbw.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=28734](https://dbw.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=28734)), you can use the shortener platform and customize the link to whatever you want, in this case: <http://bit.ly/CABoatCourse>.

Another great feature of these platforms is that they offer analytics on the shortened links. You can go back to <https://goo.gl/> or [www.bitly.com](http://www.bitly.com) later and see how many clicks there were on that link.

2. **Know Your Audience:** You know your boaters better than anyone. Are most of the boaters in your state going to lakes? Is there one lake or river that's more popular than most? Is there a type of fish that boaters love to fish for? Plug in those details. The generic messaging and designs Spring Aboard provides you will couple well with a custom Facebook post or tweet. Here's an example:



Generic Tweet: Limitless adventures await you on the water! Take a #safeboating class and @SpringAboard for boating fun #springaboard [www.springaboard.org](http://www.springaboard.org).

Custom Tweet from @boat\_california: Heading out to the Delta this weekend? Limitless adventures await you on the water! Take a #safeboating class and @SpringAboard for boating fun #springaboard <http://bit.ly/CABoatCourse>

- 3. Create original content and share partners' posts:** Your followers want to hear from you and the unique perspective you offer when it comes to boating in their state. Create original, custom content that your followers can relate to (this goes back to the “Customize Your Campaign” tip above).

In addition, share from your partners! Not only will this help get some of the great work of your boating safety partners in front of the eyes of your followers, but it also saves you from doing more work! If you notice a partner’s post or tweet has received a lot of Likes and Retweets, take advantage by sharing their post on your own page and don’t forget to include your own custom message when sharing.

## Organizations

- 1. Promote Your Mission:** Every time that you post on social media, you are promoting your organization’s mission and the programs that support that mission. Don’t stray too far from that mission. For example, if your organization’s mission is focused on paddling and paddling safety, don’t post too many photos of boaters in powerboats or other types of boats that are not paddling boats.

If your organization has a niche, for example you are one of the leading organizations promoting Life Jacket Loaner Stations, bring that message into the Spring Aboard Campaign, i.e. – Did you know that 83% of recreational boaters that drowned in 2016 weren’t wearing a life jacket? You’ll learn even more about the importance of wearing a life jacket by taking a safe boating course and you can put that knowledge into practice during your next boating trip by borrowing a life jacket from a free life jacket loaner station in your area! [Link to Life Jacket Loaner Station website].

Note: Using statistics is important to support your posts, but find a way to turn those statistics into stories. For example, you could use the same statistic above, but then introduce a “Saved by the Jacket” story, i.e.:

Did you know that 83% of recreational boaters that drowned in 2016 weren’t wearing a life jacket? These four boaters off the coast of Florida are a true example of what a difference a life jacket can make: <http://bit.ly/2DAdUSW>. @MyFWCLife

- 2. Tag the Media:** All boating safety organizations want to get their story or article featured in the media. While this is an achievable goal, it is a lofty one. You can help your media contacts out by tagging them in your posts. When you tag the



media (or any other group), they will get a notification that they're tagged. This may prompt them to share the post or comment on it.

- 3. Thank Your Partners:** Did a recent post of yours get shared by a lot of your partners? Did you notice that your tweet was liked by someone new, but with similar interests? Take the time to visit their page and thank them for helping to promote the Spring Aboard campaign.

## Media

- 1. Use Spring Aboard Deliverables:** We all have a shared mission when it comes to Spring Aboard: getting boaters to take a safe boating course. We understand that a time-sensitive story is going to get more traction than a standard boilerplate message and we have drafted the social media messages to be timely and relevant to varied audiences.
- 2. Use Common Terms:** When everyone is using common terminology, it helps promote the importance of the message itself. The National Safe Boating Council has done the hard work for you: visit [www.boatbeat.org](http://www.boatbeat.org) to learn standard terms used in the boating safety industry and use them in your articles and posts. For example, the term "life jacket" has more resonance with boaters than "PFD" or "life preserver."
- 3. Reach Out to Partners for Interviews through Social Media:** It's likely that you're getting approached by boating safety organizations and state agencies to conduct interviews in preparation for Spring Aboard and the boating season. But you're often the first to know about a boating accident. When this happens, you can be sure that boating safety organizations throughout the country want to speak with you so they can share safe boating tips with your readers.

Email and phone are still great ways to reach boating safety organizations, but so is social media. Reach out to these partners through a direct message on Facebook and Twitter and you'll likely receive a response quickly.



# Course Providers

## Third-Party Course Verification of Skills Training

**Are you an On-Water Skills Course Provider? If so, this section is for you. Below is information on how you begin the Third-Party Course Verification process. Following this information is an introduction of how you can promote that your course has been verified as meeting the American National Standards for On-Water Skills.**

With support from the U.S. Coast Guard, a voluntary third-party conformity assessment process is available to verify if an on-water skills course meets American National Standards for Power, Sail, and Human-Propelled. Successful completion will include the award of a uniquely-numbered “Verified Course” mark indicating “The content of this course conforms to the American National Standard for on-water skills as verified through an independent third-party assessment process.”

Recognized by the American National Standards Institute as American National Standards, the On-Water Power, On-Water Sailing, and On-Water Human-Propelled standards identify fundamental skills that entry level recreational boat operators should be able to demonstrate after receiving instruction. The standards are freely available for voluntary application by organizations providing recreational boating instructional programs. More information about these standards can be found at [www.abycinc.org](http://www.abycinc.org) or [www.onwaterstandards.org](http://www.onwaterstandards.org).

Course Providers earning the Verified Course mark will sign a Terms and Conditions agreement to provide numeric and survey data needed to evaluate the USCG National Recreational Boating Safety Strategic Plan. This information includes:

- numeric data of numbers of students enrolled in and completing the Verified Course;
- distribution to students of an online survey link (provided) to evaluate the level of recognition and influence on a student’s decision to enroll in a course due to the Verified Course mark;
- the course provider’s agreement to provide the course content as submitted; and,
- course provider’s agreement to provide feedback on the overall program.

### Current Providers of the Third-Party Conformity Assessment process include:

- National Association of State Boating Law Administrators - Third-party conformity assessment at NO COST through a U.S. Coast Guard administered grant program for a limited time. Information at <https://www.nasbla.org/education/verified>.
- *(Other organizations added as announced.)*



## Promoting Third-Party Course Verification of Skills Training on Social Media

You've done it! You've been verified by a Third-Party Verifier that you have met the American National Standards for Power, Sail, or Human-Propelled (or maybe all three)!

Be proud of your accomplishment by taking the great news to social media. Here's some tips:

1. Demonstrate safe boating behaviors: In all your social media posts, be sure that your media (photos, videos, etc.) demonstrate safe boating behaviors. Everyone should be wearing life jackets; alcohol and other substances should never be seen on a boat; and other general safe boating behaviors should be demonstrated.
2. Talk about the benefit to the boater: Why should a boater take your course? What does it mean for a boater to take a course that has received Third-Party Course verification? Introduce the story of your company/organization and highlight why it's so important that your course(s) following the American National Standards.
3. Spring Aboard, but make the campaign deliverables work for you: We know that boating occurs year-round, but a lot of boaters are more interested in taking on-water courses during the warmer months. The deliverables presented as part of Spring Aboard can be tweaked to promote your courses during the summer. Determine what deliverables will work best for you, make minor changes, and start reaching out to boaters!

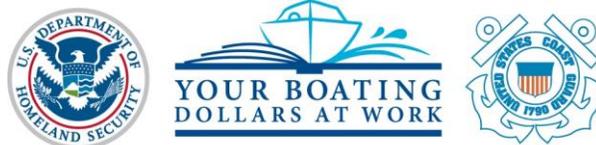
There are so many benefits to implementing social media into your communications plan. For those that want to fully invest in Social Media Marketing, that investment can mean as much as hiring a new staff member to focus on Online Communications and promoting social media posts through purchased advertising. Or, it could mean more of an investment of time: social media does take time and effort. You can invest as much or as little as your organization or company determines is worth that investment.

Remember the statistics noted above: **79% of all adult Americans are on Facebook.** The investment into social media – whatever level you choose – is worth getting your organization or company's name and mission to the end-user: the recreational boater. Boaters are online: researching, browsing or engaging about their hobby. Be there for them by offering your expertise, knowledge and services.



Reference in this Social Media Campaign Messaging Plan to any specific commercial products, processes, or services, or the use of any trade, firm or corporation name is for the information and convenience of the public, and does not constitute endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the U.S. Coast Guard.

For more information, visit [www.USCGBoating.org](http://www.USCGBoating.org).



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<sup>i</sup> PewInternet.org

<sup>ii</sup> The Corps Foundation Boating Safety Public Service Announcement Campaign (Grant #1402.07)